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Magic realism; The magic wand of Salman Rushdie

Abstract: Salman Rushdie, the magic realist used magic realism as his magic wand to draw upon a world of his own dream and aspirations. His magic world is a mythical world where anything can happen; he used magic realism with a purpose. He uses to comment upon the contemporary world. He used it for social criticism. His magic wand created by the osmosis of his thought, was a world where miracles come true, where people do not fight in the name of religion. In his world he creates his own code of morality, his own time schedule and his own social and political orders. His magic world is the world of supernatural, magicians and djinns. Rushdie believed that unreal and magical world are far more reliable modes of storytelling. We find examples of his magic in almost all his novels. The world of reality was built on prejudices and misconceptions, whereas the magical world was a dream world built on imaginations, dreams and our hidden aspirations. The magical world was more fascinating for Rushdie and reality can break a writer's heart.

Key Words: magical world, supernatural, social criticism, living dead, morality.

“... I buried myself in fairytales. Hatim Tai and Batman, Superman and Sindbad helped to get me through the

nearly nine years... I became Aladdin, voyaging in a fabulous cave; I imagined Ali Baba's forty thieves hiding in the dusted urns ; ... I turned into the genie of the lamp, and thus avoided, for the most part, the terrible notion that I, alone in the universe, had no idea what I should be, or how I should behave... (MC, 153).

These are the lines from *Midnight's Children*, by Salman Rushdie, where he made the protagonist Saleem Sinai; fantasize to be in a fairy world, actually being inside the washing chest. Rushdie, the magician, with his magic wand of magic realism make us travel into a magical world, which is resided by magicians, jugglers, prophecies, fortune tellers. It is the world which is unpredicted, unnatural, and unbelievable though fantastic and beautiful.

"Magic" means change brought by confusing tricks. A magical world is a mythical world where anything can happen. In this magical world of Rushdie people possess power, which is not seen in normal human beings. It is such a world where we can see people flying in baskets, and magicians performing surprising feats. These lines from *Midnight's Children*, shows the magical feats performed by Parvati on Saleem Sinai.

... Parvati whispered some other word and inside the basket of invisibility, I Saleem Sinai, complete with my loose anonymous garments, vanished instantly into air ... vanished? ...Disappeared; Dematerialized... Really...truly. I was in the basket, but also not in the basket. (386)

One of the weapons of Rushdie's magic realism was magic. He used magic in his creations with a purpose. Magic world is a world of fantasy, which the distinction between reality and

truth is blurred; it is world away from the hatred and violence. It is world which lies in the realms of time and timelessness. It is a world of illusion, away from reality as “Realism can break a writer’s heart? (*Shame*, 70)

In the world of magic created by the magician Rushdie, by his wand of magic realism, is actually a world created by the osmosis of his thoughts. It is a world where people are not known as Christians, Muslims or Hindus.

Rushdie’s magic world is just like the world of painting of Aurora, where she paints a ‘golden age’, where ‘Jews, Christians, Muslims, Parsis, Sikhs, Buddhist, Jains... revealed as a glorious butterfly, whose wings were a miraculous composite of all colors of the world, (*The Moor’s Last Sigh*, 227).

It is the world beyond the realm of hatred and violence. Rushdie uses magic to make miracles come true. Through his miraculous world, he imagines a new world where religion does not divide people but unite people. He thus even goes to the extent of imagining a world, where there is no religion but only religion of truth. He writes: -

There are course no such thing as miracles, but if there were and so tomorrow we wake up to find no more, because on earth no more devout Christian, Muslims, Hindus, Jews... since they wouldn’t be dangerous any more, the world would become capable of compelling the belief that leads to truth... (*The Ground beneath her Feet*, 458).

Rushdie apart from using, magic realism to create a world of truth and unity uses it for varied purposes. Magic realism is creation of a fantasy world,

defining the term 'Magic Realism' Brenda.k.Marshall writes, " A text that is called magic realism is one which disregards the 'natural' or physical laws' which we have to see as normal" (*Teaching the Post Modern*, 179). Magic realism creates a fantasy world, which gives scope to the writer to re-shape the world. It provides the writer an opportunity to construct his own scheme of morality, his own time structure, his own political and social order, but in doing so, he doesn't apparently escape from the contemporary reality. The purpose of creating a magic world, a miraculous world a fantasy world is to comment upon the real world to explore the moral, philosophical, social restrictions imposed by it. By the medium of magic realism Rushdie explores the inner working of the personality, and the relationship of the individual with those around him. Thus the magic wand of Rushdie makes us enter into the world where we find familiar made strange and strange made familiar. His magic wand at times creates a supernatural world. The world of soul and jinn, the world of souls is beautifully picturized in *The Ground Beneath her feet*, where Cama is foreshadowed by his dead twin brother Gaya, whose influence he could feel throughout his life.

Cama, born of his dead twins shadow, turned out to be what the ancient called psycho pomp, one concerned with the retrieval of lost souls, the souls of the beloved dead...ormus would be still...searching the empires of the unseen, probing the depths of the world... hunting (and eventually finding) Gaya mart...ormus had shadow selves, the many others who played and came to define his life. It might not be so fanatical to say that his dead twin was...in the shifting shape of ormus's monochrome, protean shade, still alive" (54).

Thus Rushdie effectively pictures “the shadow world” which according to him “is evidently a good deal more fascinating than the one most people inhabit” (*imaginary Homelands*, 221). Rushdie in picturing the shadow world, the world of supernatural, actually reveals our deepest fears, our hidden aspirations, wish, hopes, trauma, weaken, which actually take these forms. “A man has to face great struggle, i.e. struggle between good/evil, reason/unreason” (*Ground Beneath her Feet*, 55) and also has to struggle between past/ present, real /unreal, dead/living, often these struggles leads to osmosis of our thoughts, which gives a soaring flight to our imagination, and in such imagination we see, supernatural beings, which are actually a willful creation of our mind. Again proceeding to Cama’s life being over shadowed by Gaya, Rushdie says that though Cama had temporary relief from his shadow, but it overshadowed him again after his lover Vina’s death. When Vina was surrounded by the calamity of earthquake, and when the earth was engulfing her, the last photograph, revealed an individual with Vina. Though anybody could not recognize the man with Vina, in her last time, Cama was sure that “Vina’s phantom lover” (447) was no other than Gayamart, his twin. He says “maybe he died with her, but maybe he’s still out there” (476). Commenting upon this condition of Cama, Rushdie writes, “he is in consciousness, that surfaces intermittently between long, damaging hibernations and is no longer capable of seeing things, as they are beyond his shrouded walls” (476).

It was Abraham (in *The Moor’s Last Sigh*) who saw his dead father, in the tiles of the synagogue floor, when he was a child. He saw his father, in different images, periodically, in a different atmosphere, “just shifting of the scene”, as in a movie.

His father had appeared...in a little blue rowing boat
with blue - skinned foreign looking types by his side,
heading off towards an equally blue horizon...

Next he saw his father in a cerulean scene of Dionysiac willow – pattern merry making amid stain dragon and grumbling violence.

He found his father and wealthy in one tile seated upon cushion in the position of royal ease and waited upon eunuchs and dancing girls. A few months later he was skinny and mendicant. (216).

By the odyssey of Solomon Castile i.e. Abraham's father, appearing on the tiles, Rushdie paints the oscillations of the man, wildly throughout the life, seeking fortune. To seek happiness, he shows man wandering, in search of his destiny and ultimately, when he uses up all his energy, will power, he is like a “ heavenly body broken away from the gravity” (76).

“The shifting of scene” from horror, suspense, ghost and magic, all is beautifully described (in *Midnight's Children*) in Saleem's journey through the Sunderbans; before making his intentional journey to the magic world of Sunderbans “Rushdie, gives the reason and need of such a flight, he says”

“To all my needs I should like to make his naked-breasted admission... I ... finally incapable of continuing in the submissive performance of ... duty took to heels and fled... when I hope to immortalize in pickles, as well as words that condition of the spirit in which the consequences of the acceptance could not be denied, in which an overdose of reality gave birth to a miasmic longing for flight into the safety of dreams...” (360).

Describing the journey to the sunderbans, by Saleem, now as a sniffer, and other three of the army, named Ajooba, Saheed and Farooq, Rushdie beautifully and artistically paints a magical world, just like an expert magician, who can make happen anything before our eyes, just by moving his magic wand. Thus the “shifting of images” stars with:

The jungle closed behind like a tomb... The place receded before them like the lantern of a ghost... the mystery of evening compounded the unreality of the trees, the sunderbans began to glow in the rain ... mangrove trees ... becoming thicker than elephant trunk... mangrove getting so tall...

They found their bodies covered by three inch long leeches... colorless... Ajooba woke... in the dark to find translucent figure of a peasant with a bullet hole in his heart... leaked a colorless fluid... out of the hold of his heart.....

...a monkey with the face of his mother visited Ayooba night after night...at dusk one day... he saw his brother running wildly through the forest, and became convinced that his father had died...

...translucent serpent bit and poured venom... he saw the world in mirror- image... the milky abstraction was no longer in his eyes... at midnight they awoke... to find themselves being smiled upon by four young girls of

beauty... the four hours... at last the day come when were becoming transparent... (367).

They left the “forest of illusion” (367) and were in the ‘mercy of the waves’. They were propelled out of the forest by the ‘unimaginable power ‘of the tides and waves. The supernatural atmosphere again arises when it was found that the place had no tidal record.

Similar magical atmosphere is created, when Aurora (*The Moor’s Last Sigh*) went with her daughter and husband to Buddhist cave- temples at Ionavala. In the caves, Abraham’s eye blurred and he was about to fall, when an old mushroom- selling crone, helped him from falling. Aurora, at this moment thought that his illness was probably due to distress, associated with bringing up the children and wished if she had at least “one child- who grew up, really fast”(111). A voice whispered behind her, “Obeah Jadoo, to fun”. Aurora, on turning back, couldn’t see anyone, and she doubted that it must be the mushroom selling old lady. The supernatural effect is created when Aurora was informed that mushrooms were never grown or sold in the region of Ionavala caves. The magician Rushdie creates innumerable magical instances in his works, which are laden with supernatural atmosphere. The supernatural atmosphere is further enhanced by picturing many moments when the dead make appearance before the living, guiding them, warning them from the forthcoming calamities. At times his characters show as uncommon trend known as “living dead”. In such cases the characters though may be physically persisting in the world, but as considered as dead by the society. They at times have to survive, away from the society, in the realms of nature, all alone, living just like a dead person would do.

His conception of “Living Dead” is though seen in Moor (*The Moor’s Last Sigh*) and Saleem (*Midnight’s Children*), but this accurately designed in the character of Boonyi Kaul. She had been declared dead, out casted, and made to spend her

remaining life in the realms of mountainous forest in a Gujjar prophetess hut, for her sin of betraying her husband, breaking the norms of a married lady.

Rushdie by the character of Pandit Pyarelal, illustrates and explains the nature of “Mritak” “the living dead”. He puts that “Kal” means yesterday tomorrow, it is “time”. He puts:

Only the living dead are free of ‘time’, ‘Kal’. The ‘Mritak’ was to live in the world and yet not live in it. To extinguish the fire burning in the mind and live the holy life of detachment. The living dead manifests love within her... bear her sufferings... she controls all her senses (*Shalimar the Clown* 226).

Boonyi waited for her death, for the “Kal” to come, when she will inhale last, for the sin of indulging in “forbidden lust” (*Shalimar the Clown* 227). Rushdie always plunges deep in the meaning of the events and wants to message that, reality world is always painful; there is no escape in the world of reality. “The Forbidden apple” leads to the fall of man, and “Forbidden lust” lead to the fall of Boonyi. Thus when there is no escape for our sins in the reality world, man takes refuge in the arms of “shadow world”, “invisible world” or the magical world.

Rushdie always believed that the unreal and the magical are far more reliable modes of storytelling. The magic has special position in his fiction, as in the inner depth of realistic truth lies our inner most desires, fears and anxieties. The magical world is only the projection of such world. Rushdie’s world is totally magical. The most appropriate example is the magical qualities possessed by thousands and one child born in the midnight hour. These were the children who could walk thorough mirrors, girls who could multiply fish; they had the power of transforming into wolves and perform magical feats. The

magical world may be seemed unreal but Rushdie puts in *Imaginary Homelands*; ... unreality is the only weapon with which reality can be smashed, so that it may subsequently be reconstructed. (122).

The fundamental purpose of Rushdie to web a magical world was to portray the reality. He used magic as a tool to depict to social criticism. Magic surrounds almost all his novels. May it be the telepathic power of Saleem, the grotesque of Sufiya in *Shame*, the abnormal growth of Moor. While Saleem's power and journey is used to socially criticize the Indian scenario, on the other hand the creation of Sufiya is done to depict the complex socio-political realities of Pakistan. In *The Moor's Last Sigh* he uses the stain of magic to subvert the social realities. Whatever may be the reason, "the writer admits/ confesses that he is a magician, and a magical realist writer" (*profaning the sacred*, Randeep Rana, 155). He is wishfully hopeful that the real life obeys the same laws as his fictional world, the magical world. The world of reality is built on prejudices, ignorance, misconceptions and on the other hand the world of magic is built on dreams, secret aspirations, imagination and desire. Rushdie finds the magic world always more fascinating. He gets his energy from it as thus he says "...I was heading abracadabra abracadabra into the heart of a nostalgia which would keep me alive long enough to write these pages..." (*Midnight's Children* 450).

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